



# RE-ECHO

*Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society*

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## SUMMER CELEBRATIONS

St. Louis Park's history of summer celebrations goes back virtually to the beginnings of the City, centering on the Fourth of July. As far back as the 1880s, John Young remembered getting up at 4 in the morning on the Fourth of July to watch the lighting of the cannon in the town square, waking everyone up. Ben Brown remembered one Fourth of July that included a contest to climb a greased pole to get money at the top.

One particular Fourth of July was captured by a photograph in 1911. It shows a decorated coal wagon led by a couple of donkeys to make a float for the parade. Village character Dutch Reider is one of three men seen wearing policeman's uniforms that must have been "borrowed" from Hopkins, as there were three uniforms but only one policeman in the Park at the time. Mrs. Thomas Thompson recalled that the men "got together early in the morning. By noon they were already full of holiday spirit and spirits." Since it seemed like everyone in town was in the parade, Mrs. Thompson wondered who was left to watch it.

There was also a tradition of Fireman's Carnivals, which raised money for various purposes every year until 1963. The carnival in 1913 raised money for a new library, and funds from the carnival in 1914 went to the family of Esther Monson, who was killed in a tornado that year. Starting during the Depression, the profits from the carnivals were used for the mobile Santa Claus program, in which Santa went around on a fire truck, distributing food to 30-40 needy families.

There were no fireworks in 1946, perhaps because the returning soldiers had no stomach for bombs bursting in air, or perhaps due to the polio epidemic which kept people away from group events.

Celebrations continued during the modern era. Robin Hood Days, an elaborate event sponsored the Chamber of Commerce, was held from 1967 to 1971. Various celebrations were held in the '70s, including Olde Time Picnics and Ice Cream Socials sponsored by the Historical Society. A big event was the Bicentennial and the City's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1976, for which Palm Bakery made a birthday cake for 1,000 people.

Party in the Park ran from 1980 to 1991, followed by Parktacular, which started in 1995.

There are many more stories about summer celebrations on our web site at [www.slphistory.org/history/earlycelebrations.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/history/earlycelebrations.asp).

## THIS 'N' THAT

**COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUES:** The Historical Society has ordered three commemorative plaques to be placed at historic places in St. Louis Park. The plaques were paid for with funds donated in the name of Don Swenson, the author of *Something in the Water*, who passed away last year. One will be on the historic Walker Building, which was built in 1892. The second will also be on the Walker Building, highlighting the Swenson-Redeen Meat Market and Grocery, owned by Don's father, which was located in the building from 1923 to 1948. The third plaque will be placed on the Historic Depot in Jorvig Park. If anyone has any suggestions of other historic sites that merit recognition, please let us know.

**CALENDAR KUDOS:** The City of St. Louis Park and St. Louis Park Public Schools were cited with an Award of Merit in Visual Design for the 2008-2009 City-School Calendar. The calendar was a collaboration between the City, school district and the St. Louis Park Historical Society, which provided the pictures. The award came from the Minnesota Association of Government Communicators (MAGC) at the group's 27<sup>th</sup> annual Northern Lights Awards on May 21. MAGC is a peer organization of communications professional from city, county, state and federal government, as well as school districts, universities, colleges, nonprofits and agencies serving these organizations that are all dedicated to improving public-sector communications. "It is an incredible honor to receive this recognition from our peers," said Jamie Zwilling, the city's communications coordinator. "St. Louis Park really understands how important strong and diverse communications are to engaging with the public. These awards show that we're not only keeping up with our peers in this respect, but we're at the head of the pack."

**SUMMER JAM:** July 1 is the date for a unique concert at the Wolfe Park Amphitheater. Park High graduates David and Bobby Rivkin will return for a reunion of the KO band that they were associated with in the 1970s. David was in three rock 'n' roll bands in the '60s: The Chancellors, the High Spirits, and Stillroven. He is now a successful songwriter, session musician, record promoter, producer, and engineer. Bobby was the drummer for Prince and the Revolution between 1978 and 1987 and is now a producer and songwriter. These remarkable musicians grew up at 37<sup>th</sup> and Glenhurst. Also on the bill is the *Blood on the Tracks* studio band, which backed Bob Dylan on several tracks of his seminal album in 1974. This once-in-a-lifetime outdoor concert is free, with free parking at the Rec Center and the Excelsior and Grand ramps.

**OLDEST BUSINESSES:** We have noted in our last newsletter that Al's Bar has been in business continually since 1926 – that's 83 years! We wonder if there are other places that have been in business for many years. Bunny's was at its original location starting in 1934, and at its present location since 1998, for a total of 75 years. What are some other long-term businesses in the Park?

**LILAC WAY DOCUMENTARY:** The documentary that **tpt** produced several years ago is now available on our web site at [www.slphistory.org/beehivemaster.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/beehivemaster.asp) It is a big file and may take several minutes to load, but it is a very well-done account of the building of Highway 100 (aka Lilac Way) and the roadside parks.

**INK:** If anyone uses #10, #45, or #78 toner cartridges, please call Jeanne at 612-396-6292 and we'll give them to you free.

## DONATIONS RECEIVED

*We have received generous donations since the last Re-Echo. Thanks to everyone!*

Ardyce Eckdahl donated a 1968 *Echowan*.

The new owner of the Palm Bakery building found some artifacts from the bakery. He gave them to City Inspector Manny Camilon, who gave them to the Historical Society. If and when we get exhibit space, this will make for a great display!

John Billman donated various news clippings. Mr. Billman, who owned Park Funeral Home at Excelsior Blvd. and Highway 100, made many contributions to life in St. Louis Park, working with the Community Fund and other charitable causes. His picture was on the front of the St. Louis Park Directory for many years and is one of the best-known faces in the Park!

McCarthy's Restaurant was a fixture in St. Louis Park, located on the north side of Wayzata Blvd.

(now Highway 394). Keith McCarthy, a pilot for Northwest Airlines, was the owner and namesake. But they say the real power behind the throne, so to speak, was a notorious gangster named Tommy Banks. Meredith McCarthy, Keith's brother, has donated a hat that Tommy Banks wore, as evidenced by his initials in the band. What a great artifact! Mr. McCarthy remembers that Banks was mean and cruel to him and others (particularly his wife), and tried to make up for it by tipping generously.

Not a donation but related to gangster ties, a production company has approached us for information about Kid Cann, king of the Minneapolis underworld. We referred him to Paul Maccabee, author of *Dillinger Slept Here*, a book about Twin City gangsters. Maccabee is the expert on Kid Cann, and will be interviewed for the production. For information on Kid Cann, see our website at [www.slphistory.org/history/kidcann.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/history/kidcann.asp)

## THE NEW LILAC PARK

Some explanation: Several roadside picnic areas were built along Highway 100 in 1939 when the highway was built. The park at Minnetonka Blvd. was originally called Lilac Park. Last fall the beehive fireplace at that location was moved to St. Louis Park Roadside Park, at Highway 7 by the Nordic Ware tower. Now that the original Lilac Park is no more, St. Louis Park Roadside Park has become the new Lilac Park.

The Grand Opening of the newly-restored Lilac Park will take place on **July 13 at 6:00 pm**. The City has done a fantastic job of restoring the beehive and all of the stone structures, including picnic tables, fire pit and council ring. There are also matching areas for a bike rack, trash receptacle, and bathroom

facilities. This beautiful restored park is accessed by a service road in front of Nordic Ware, at Beltline Blvd. and Highway 7.

The project resulted from a collaboration by the City, Mn/DOT, the Three Rivers Park District, and the St. Louis Park Historical Society, which donated \$10,000 for renovation of the Beehive. The project would not have been possible without the leadership of Park Superintendent Rick Birno, who wrote the proposal, got funding from the City, worked closely with Mn/DOT, hired the contractors, and planned the Grand Opening. Thanks, Rick for working to preserve this precious bit of St. Louis Park history.

## SUMMER HOURS AT THE DEPOT

The Historic Depot at Jorvig Park will be open to the public this summer on Saturdays from 1-4 pm. Come and see the Depot and the railroad artifacts inside. We continue to hold office hours at our Lenox location on Mondays and Thursdays from 10 am to noon.

**ST. LOUIS PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ONE-STOP-SHOPPING FORM**

**Annual Individual/Family Membership: \$20**

**Business and Individual Benefactor Member Donation:  
\$50, \$75, \$100 or other amount**

**Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**During winter months from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_:**

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Check all that apply:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I wish to join the Historical Society: enclosed is \$\_\_\_\_\_**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I wish to donate to the Restoration of the Beehive Fund: enclosed is \$\_\_\_\_\_**

**All membership and Beehive donations are tax-deductible.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I wish to purchase a copy of *Something in the Water*: enclosed is \$20.**

**Total amount enclosed: \$\_\_\_\_\_**

**Re-Echo Options:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I wish to continue to receive the Re-Echo through the mail.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I wish to receive the Re-Echo via E-mail.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I will read the Re-Echo on the SLPHS web site at**

**[www.slphistory.org/reecho/default.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/reecho/default.asp)**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I do not wish to receive the Re-Echo.**

**Mail to:** **St. Louis Park Historical Society  
3700 Monterey Drive  
St. Louis Park, MN 55416-2671**

**Our email:** **[history@slphistory.org](mailto:history@slphistory.org)**

**KJ BR JA MC FR**

## WHO WE ARE

The St. Louis Park Historical Society was founded in 1971 to collect, preserve, and disseminate the history of the City of St. Louis Park, Minnesota. The archives of the Society are located in the Historic Depot in Jorvig Park (37<sup>th</sup> and Brunswick) and at the Lenox Community Center (6715 Minnetonka Blvd.). Office hours at the Lenox site are Mondays and Thursdays from 10 to noon, and by appointment. Our mailing address is:  
3700 Monterey Drive  
St. Louis Park, MN 55416

Our email address is  
**history@slphistory.org.**

We do not have a central phone number, but you may contact a member of our Board:

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## ABOUT THE RE-ECHO

The Re-Echo is published quarterly by the St. Louis Park Historical Society. Its purpose is to share information about the City's history and the Society's activities. The Re-Echo was started by Robert C. Reiss. The name was inspired by the *Echo* newspaper, which has been published by and for the students of St. Louis Park High School since 1917.

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

We hope you will take advantage of our "One-Stop-Shopping" form, included in this issue, especially to indicate your Re-Echo distribution option. With such a large mailing list, any issues that can be sent by email or viewed on our web site would save on time and effort. Regardless of your preference, we strive to get the news of the Society to everyone who expresses an interest.

## JOIN US!

The St. Louis Park Historical Society is a nonprofit organization and is wholly dependent on membership dues and donations for its operating costs, including the cost of mailing the Re-Echo. You don't have to be a member to receive the Re-Echo, but we need new members, especially active ones. Meetings are at 7pm on the first Tuesday of the month, and are open to all. They are held at Lenox Community Center October-May and at the Historic Depot June-September.

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